

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Dr. Casey Cutter
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Sam Houston Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 330 Melrose Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Maryville State TN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 37803-4814

County Blount

Telephone (865) 983-3241 Fax _____

Web site/URL <https://she.maryville-schools.org/> E-mail casey.cutter@maryville-shools.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Mike Winstead E-mail mike.winstead@maryville-schools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Maryville City School District Tel. (865) 982-7121

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Nick Black
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- ☒ Urban (city or town)
☐ Suburban
☐ Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	61	58	119
1	68	62	130
2	63	57	120
3	78	58	136
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	270	235	505

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1.4 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 6.3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 83.6 % White
 - 3.7 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 9%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	25
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	21
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	46
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	505
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Amharic, Arabic, Dinka, Gujarati, Spanish, & Ukranian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
9 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 29 %

Total number students who qualify: 145

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %

67 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>8</u> Autism	<u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>8</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>10</u> Developmental Delay	<u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>38</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>3</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	22
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

The mission of Sam Houston Elementary is to provide a high-quality education for all students in a safe, nurturing environment.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

We have offered both traditional and digital learning options all school year long. Around 80% of our parents chose to send their students to our traditional school at the beginning of the year and around 20% chose to enroll their students in our digital learning program. Based on the student numbers, we have utilized a combination of digital teachers at our school and district digital teachers to teach our digital students. We also have one 1st grade teacher who has taught a hybrid classroom the majority of the year, where half the students attend in person and the other half simultaneously attend class virtually. All parents have been given the option to switch their students from digital to traditional learning or traditional to digital learning once during the 2020-2021 school year. We have had around 16.5% of our digital students transition back to traditional learning over the course of the school year. As of the start of the fourth quarter, we have 96.5% students enrolled in traditional learning and only 3.5% still participating in digital learning.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

Maryville, Tennessee is a beautiful town nestled between the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Knoxville, Tennessee. People are drawn from all over to our beautiful views, friendly community, and amazing schools. Sam Houston Elementary (SHE) is one of three elementary schools in our district that serves kindergarten, first, second, and third grade students. Sam Houston Elementary is widely regarded as a “sweet, little school” that consistently provides high quality education for all students in a safe, nurturing environment. Our school song captures the essence of our school when it says, “We’re the Sam Houston Smokies, the place to learn and grow! We’re the Sam Houston Smokies, it’s the best school that we know!”

Our school is a partnership between a supportive district, committed parents, dedicated teachers, and engaged students. Our school’s success begins with the support of our district. The district always finds a way to serve our students, whether through the contribution of resources and materials or through a site-based management approach that allows each school to creatively meet their students’ needs.

Equally important is the support of our parents and community. Our city prides itself in the success of our schools, and our community stops at nothing to provide our schools with what we need. The Maryville City Schools Foundation and our PTO have raised thousands of dollars to support our teachers and students’ needs and to fund a variety of innovative programs at our school over the years. Simply put, our parents “show up.” Many of our parents partner with our teachers to support their student’s education at home, and we believe so strongly in the teacher/parent partnership that we actively pursue any parents who may not be as involved in their student’s education.

We aim to hire the very best teachers and then provide them with the autonomy and support to best meet their students’ needs. Our staff works tirelessly to create an environment where every student is known by name. We believe that every student has a story, and it is our job as educators to work hard to learn that story. We know that we can only achieve academic success by learning that story and supporting the needs of the whole child. We utilize our “Smokie Way” positive behavioral support system and comprehensive school counseling program to meet our students’ social-emotional needs first. From there, our teachers utilize their strong relationships and understanding of individual strengths and weaknesses to help the students meet our rigorous academic expectations.

The support of our district, community, and parents allows our teachers to approach teaching with an innovative mindset. Our school led the charge to become a one-to-one school over four years ago because we knew it would allow us to redefine the way we teach and meet our students’ needs. The combination of providing an iPad for every student, with talented teachers and high-quality training has allowed our teachers to meet their students’ needs in all new creative ways. This creative shift four years ago has been paramount in our success as a school during the pandemic. Our school aims to provide students with unique experiences that integrate our love for literacy. During the pandemic, our school utilized the book *Family Is A Superpower* to create a Story Walk for families to safely walk on the greenway and read the individual pages of the book together while getting excellent exercise. Our school partnered with the Maryville City Schools Foundation and other community partners to put on a One Book Blitz this year that purchased the book, *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate, for every student. During the month long One Book Blitz, the school partnered with our PTO to transform our school into a small town straight from the book. Each class read the book in class every day and the Blitz culminated with a family and schoolwide event that allowed for students to put their very own wishes on our Wishtree.

This creative approach has continued through the pandemic. Our school’s early one-to-one adoption allowed for our students to transition almost seamlessly into virtual learning during the pandemic and only miss two days of learning. In fact, through a blend of virtual and in-person learning, it has been suggested that our school and district have had more instructional days than any other school in the nation. During the pandemic and with the permission of the local Health Department, our school has initiated our own contact tracing in order to react quickly and protect the safety of our students. Our staff has taken this same creative approach in finding ways to connect with our families during a pandemic. This “whatever it takes” mentality epitomizes our school and is a big reason for our success before and during the pandemic.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Sam Houston's instructional approach begins with hiring the very best teachers and providing them with the autonomy to choose the best instructional practices to meet individual student needs. We are able to attract top talent thanks to our district and school's stellar reputation and salaries/benefits.

Our teachers not only lead with the standards, but they spend the necessary amount of time collaboratively unpacking the standards to ensure full understanding of the standard and to consider what background skills they may need to build upon. Once they have unpacked the standard, they determine the objective and the success criteria for their students so that everyone clearly knows what they need to be able to do by the end of the lesson. Once the objective and success criteria have been established, the teachers review the curriculum and digital resources to fill in the gaps while implementing instructional practices to help the students get to the end learning destination.

Each Sam Houston student has had their own iPad for the last four years, and teachers see this piece of technology as one component of the Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge (TPaCK) model. They believe that a great lesson must start with strong teacher content knowledge and excellent pedagogical practices. Only then can the iPad be used as a tool to push instruction and student thinking to a higher level.

The district and school leadership have utilized a blend of district funds and Title I funding to ensure that every classroom at Sam Houston has a part time teaching assistant. The majority of these teaching assistants have college degrees, and some even have a teaching license. Teachers utilize these assistants as a second teacher in the classroom. It is commonplace to walk into a classroom and see two small groups being run simultaneously or see multiple students receiving individual attention because of these important positions.

We use a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure our students' mastery of the standards. Our one-to-one technology allows us to use programs like Nearpod, Mastery Connect, and Seesaw to formatively assess student progress during the course of the lesson. Our school works hard to build a summative assessment schedule before the school year ever begins. Our summative assessment benchmarks are generally given three times of year and consist of STAR Reading, Scholastic NSGRA Reading, iReady Math diagnostic and CASE ELA and Math. The especially difficult CASE assessment closely aligns with the state assessment has helped us to raise our expectations and the level of rigor for our students.

Over the last few years our district has shifted to creating a more balanced literacy program. We believe in ensuring our students are exposed to rich, engaging, and diverse grade level text, and they have opportunities to delve into rigorous yet appropriate texts. We focus on the five pillars of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Our reading instruction blends guided reading, explicit phonics instruction, read alouds, shared reading, independent reading, writing, and mini lessons to meet our students' needs. Recently our district purchased the Scholastic Literacy program, because it integrates authentic and high-level literature that has pushed our literacy whole group and small group instruction to a new level.

Our math instruction centers around our state standards, and our teachers teach four major concepts including Numbers and Operations, Measurement and Data, Algebra, and Geometry. Our teachers utilize the Ready math curriculum to build their lessons around the state standards and lesson's success criteria. We employ modeled whole group instruction, frequent use of manipulatives, productive struggle, math discourse that pushes our students to share their thinking and reasoning, and differentiated math small groups to meet our students' needs.

Our science instruction aligns with the TN state standards and we utilize resources like Mystery Science, Generation Genius, Flocabulary, and Brain Pop Jr. to create hands-on lessons that push students to think at a higher level.

Our Social Studies instruction blends thematic units, balanced literacy, and project-based learning to meet

our social studies state standards. Our teachers supplement their social studies instruction with Flocabulary, BrainPOP Jr., Nearpod, and others to meet students' needs.

After our school's initial shutdown in March, our years of one-to-one experience allowed us to transition to digital learning very quickly. In the Fall of 2020, our district and school initiated a hybrid learning model where parents could select their learning program of choice. Eighty percent of our families chose traditional learning while the other twenty percent chose our digital learning program. These digital teachers used years of experience and best practices to enact a learning model that had the right blend of asynchronous and synchronous learning. Finally, the district enacted a strict three strike policy to ensure that all students were engaged, and our digital learning program was of the highest quality.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The arts are an essential part of what we do at Sam Houston, and our Specials teachers work as a team to support our students. Specials teachers know every student by name and build a special relationship with each student throughout their time at Sam Houston. Our students receive special area instruction on a six-day rotation between art, STEM, life skills, library, gym, and music.

Our art teacher follows the TN standards and blends choice with variety to introduce a well-rounded variety of types and formats. She incorporates East Tennessee art, and she ensures that student artwork is displayed around the school. She has a professional quality art YouTube channel that allows students to extend their learning.

Music at Sam Houston encourages students to perform, present, create, respond, and connect to music. Our grade level music programs are uniquely designed to create community within grade levels as well as draw parents and community members into the school. Our music instruction and programs allow students to shine while incorporating grade level standards.

Our physical education program is designed to be an inviting and fun environment for students to learn about health and nutrition. Students are shown the importance of movement and pushed to think while moving. Our teacher designs activities and seeks out additional funding to encourage students and families to move and exercise outside of school. This year she obtained a grant to provide every student with a pedometer and jump rope.

We are fortunate to have a STEM class that incorporates science, technology, engineering, and math. On any given day you can walk into the class and see air velocity in action as Spheros are launched into the air, magnetic theories being tested, or robots being coded and guided through a maze. All work centers on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, students learn the basics of digital citizenship to ensure that they use their technology resources wisely.

Our Life Skills class is taught by our counselors and emphasizes appropriate social skills and establishes the cornerstone understanding of our Smokie Way Trailhead Traits. This class provides students with opportunities to practice these important skills that reiterate what it means to be a good citizen. Moreover, it challenges students to have courageous conversations thanks to discussions led by counselors.

Finally, our library media specialist creates a library environment that celebrates literacy. She has been a catalyst in securing grants to expand our diverse literacy selections, and she has brought innovative practices to our library like Makerspace and augmented reality. She coordinates a widely successful Book Fair and a NBRS 2021

One Book Blitz that helps our entire school become deeply engrossed in a book for a month. She knows the grade level standards and seeks out teachers to supplement their instruction with high quality literature.

All of these Specials classes have recorded weekly digital lessons during the pandemic that have allowed our students to continue to foster their love of the arts at home.

3. Academic Supports:

Sam Houston offers a variety of specific programs to meet the individual needs of our diverse student population. Even though our Economically Disadvantaged (EDD) students and students with disabilities (SWD) earned the highest-level growth score (level 5) on our last state assessment, there is still a distinct achievement gap between those subgroups compared to the rest of our students. We have established a variety of programs and interventions to support all of our underperforming students and our EDD and SWD subgroups.

Our programs all begin with close analysis of student data. We assess our students during three benchmark windows a year, and we use these windows to identify at risk students who are below the 25th and 10th percentile. We gather our grade level teachers, administration, Response to Intervention (RTI) teacher, and school psychologist in our monthly RTI meetings to discuss the students' assessment results and progress in class. As a team, we utilize this data and teacher insight to place students who are below the twenty-fifth percentile in a tier two intervention group and students who are below the tenth percentile in a tier three group. We go above and beyond the state's requirement that tier two students receive thirty minutes of daily intervention and we ensure that both tier two and three students both receive 45 minutes of daily intervention to help maximize their academic progress.

We have a certified RTI teacher and three additional teaching assistants that teach both traditional and digital tier two and three interventions throughout the day. Each grade level is divided into tiered groups based on ability, and they rotate through four RISE stations that focus on reading a new book, word study and phonics, rereading yesterday's book, and guided writing. They also have math groups where they focus on math fluency and number sense. The team progress monitors both their traditional and digital students either weekly or bi-weekly.

Our special education team consists of two resource teachers, one CDC teacher, and ten teaching assistants. We are strong believers of placing students in the least restrictive environment, thus our resource teachers and teaching assistant serve students predominantly in inclusive settings and also teach a few pullout resource groups.

We have two part time English Language Learner (ELL) teachers that provide differentiated pullout instruction for our ELL learners. The ELL teachers also provide a yearly training to educate our classroom teachers on how to best meet the needs of their ELL learners in the traditional classroom.

Due to the consistent academically high-performing population in our district, we have employed differentiation opportunities for advanced learners as part of the general education classrooms and through school-based opportunities. Even though we set the bar high for all of our learners, we take great pride in tailoring our instruction, tasks and assessments to challenge our very highest academically achieving students. Our teachers constantly utilize their formative and summative assessments and instructional resources to cater their assignments to the correct level for our above grade level learners. The collaborative nature of our building allows our grade level teams to learn from each other so that they can work together to ensure each of our highest performing student's needs are met.

We have regular Connecting Students with Services (CSS) meetings with our administration, counselors, and classroom teachers to address any other needs students have. These meetings allow us to discuss the student as a team and develop an action plan going forward. Action plans may involve scheduling a parent meeting, referring our students to our in-house Helen Ross McNabb mental health services program, connecting students and their families to our Family Resource Center for additional at home resources, or referring the student for additional special education testing.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Sam Houston staff members understand that student engagement begins with powerful relationships. When you walk into Sam Houston, you see teachers greeting students at the door, and you witness classes in morning meeting circles building community. At the beginning of the school year, we have an Open House to provide teachers with an opportunity to begin that relationship building process. In order to keep that tradition alive despite the pandemic, our staff decided to take the Open House to our students and visit every student at their house for our Open House Lawn Visits. We typically end the year with a “Clap Out” for our 3rd grade students where our entire student body gathers to celebrate their accomplishments. During the pandemic, our teachers held that same “Clap Out” in the driveway of our school where students and their parents could safely drive by.

In addition to strong relationships, we create an environment where character is taught and extolled. Our Smokie Way Positive Behavior System teaches our students the main eight character “trailhead traits.” Students exhibiting those traits are then recognized with beads and celebrated at our monthly Smokie Way assemblies. To continue to teach and acknowledge these traits during the pandemic, we spotlight these traits on the morning virtual Zoom announcements for both traditional and digital students to see. In order to continue our tradition of monthly Smokie Way assemblies, we televised the assemblies and took them outside.

Our comprehensive school counseling program is the hub of our school. It utilizes our counselors to support individual student needs by teaching life skills classes, providing individual student counseling, meeting with students in small groups, and joining meetings designed to connect students with services. During the pandemic, our school counselors have continued to provide these services virtually and have made frequent home visits to bring care and food to our families. We also have a licensed mental health care worker that is housed at our school and regularly meets with our students with more severe mental health needs.

Finally, in addition to meeting our students’ social-emotional needs, our teachers provide high quality instruction that engages our students. This high-quality instruction has continued during the pandemic because of their long history of utilizing one-to-one devices and their purposeful research of age-appropriate digital engagement. Our digital teachers have utilized this research to provide the right blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

At Sam Houston we believe that excellent academic growth cannot occur without collaborative partnerships with our families and community. Those partnerships begin with great communication. While we feel that face to face communication is the most effective form of communication, we utilize a variety of communication methods such as Seesaw, Swift K-12, Instagram, Twitter, and electronic newsletters to stay in constant contact with our families. Zoom meetings, outdoor meetings, and outside home visits have supplemented these electronic forms of communication and helped our teachers to continue to build these important partnerships during the pandemic.

We put on numerous family engagement events to further our parent relationships and help show them how to best support their child’s academics at home. During the closure of last school year, we put on a teacher car parade where we visited our students in their neighborhoods to say one last goodbye. Many of our family engagement events center around literacy, like our Book Bingo where all students leave with a new book, One Book Blitz family event where families take part in activities that integrate the book the school is reading and the arts, and a 2nd grade book character parade tradition where students dress up as their favorite book character. We have continued each of these activities during the pandemic by taking them outside. In addition, we have traditionally done other family events like our Historical Figure Wax Museum, Donuts with Dads, a community scavenger hunt supported by local business, and our exceptional Grade Level Music Programs.

Many of the unique programs and special traditions exist because of our amazing community partnerships. Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) puts on an annual event called the Smokie Strut that serves as the largest fundraiser for our school. Each year, the PTO purchases a school spirit t-shirt for every student and staff member. They put on fun events like a Movie Night and school carnival. All of these events add to the sense of community in our school. The Maryville City Schools Foundation has provided quintessential grants over the years to push our innovative school practices like our bongo drum program, calming room, or tricycle course to promote brain plasticity. Some of our other wonderful community partnerships have helped create some very special things like our Watch Dogs male mentor program, our outdoor music wall that promotes movement and music, our outdoor classroom, and our school garden.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At Sam Houston, we believe that our school's success begins with a healthy school culture. In a healthy school culture, teachers feel valued and supported which allows them to give their very best to students. We create a family atmosphere by putting relationships first. We encourage and support each other, and our family needed to rely on each other more than ever during the pandemic. We create a fun and positive environment for our staff by constantly showing appreciation for the work our teachers do. A few examples have been purchasing drinks for everyone, writing cards of encouragement, serving ice cream, inviting food trucks, delivering cookies, etc. We have increased these appreciation efforts during the pandemic due to the intense stresses on teachers.

Our goal is to eliminate distractions for teachers so that they can focus their full efforts on teaching their students. We do this by sending one larger weekly email instead of inundating inboxes with daily emails, having office staff lift administrative burdens off of them. Ultimately, we find success by hiring the best, trusting them as professionals, and providing them with the teacher autonomy they need. One of the biggest ways we have eliminated distractions during the pandemic has been by creating the school Covid Response team. The team has received special permission from the Health Department to conduct all of the contact tracing for our students and staff. This has eliminated any teacher contact tracing responsibility, and it has allowed us to respond immediately whenever there is a positive case or close contact at school.

Teachers know their ideas are heard, both as individual voices, and as a collective unit thanks to grade-level representation on the Faculty Council. These representatives weigh in on key decisions and contribute to our candid and professional culture by bringing feedback from their teammates. This along with an open-door administrative policy and multiple anonymous staff surveys a year help to create a culture where teacher voices are heard.

Finally, our school employs a self-directed professional development model. Teachers look into areas of PD interest that align with their professional goals and then they submit their professional development request for principal approval. The school has provided additional PD around adverse childhood experiences and research-based literacy practices over the last few years to support teachers in our goal of improving our literacy instruction and increasing our overall social-emotional support of students.

4. School Leadership:

Our shared leadership philosophy at Sam Houston centers on four main pillars. The first pillar is that relationships must come first. George Couros says, "To inspire meaningful change, you must make a connection to the heart before you can make one to the mind." Second, is that all decisions must be based on what is best for kids. Third is that we need to be student driven, but we need to use data to guide and support our decisions. An example is years ago, our school started to give the CASE 21 test, which helped us realize that we could expect even more from our students. Finally, we believe that teachers must approach teaching with ingenuity and creativity, and this approach has been more important than ever during the pandemic.

The leadership team relies on various structures to move the school forward academically. We utilize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to reflect, plan, and act upon student data. The Faculty Council provides key input to the school's leadership team and is involved in important school decisions. Faculty

Meetings take place monthly and focus on topics that improve student achievement. The administration uses a growth minded teacher evaluation system and focused professional development to help improve the school's instructional practices. PTO meetings occur monthly to help provide the school with community support in meeting stated academic goals.

The principal and assistant principal share leadership and act as a team to support the students, staff, and parents. Administrative roles have been carefully divided based on each administrator's strengths, but both administrators' most important roles are that of an instructional leader and servant leader. Every policy, program, relationship, and resource spent is evaluated through the question of, "How does this affect kids?" so that every decision made by the school centers on students.

During the pandemic the principal and assistant principal have continued to focus on serving staff and students, but our roles have shifted more to administrative roles to ensure that teachers could focus their efforts on teaching. We spent months working through the details and logistics of a safe reopening plan to bring the majority of our students back to traditional learning, while simultaneously creating a virtual program that would successfully support the growth of our digital learners. Most importantly, we have dedicated much of our time conducting contact tracing of our staff and students to ensure the safety of everyone.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

It is our desire at Sam Houston Elementary, to create an inclusive and safe environment for those who are marginalized. Our quest to ensure equity, cultural awareness, and respect begins at the district level. Maryville City School District is "passionate about cultivating and celebrating diversity within the school system and stands united against the negative impact of racism upon communities."

Our teachers are committed to building individual relationships with every student and family. This fosters an inclusive atmosphere where every child knows they are important. Morning announcements and morning meetings are held where diversity is celebrated, and students can lead conversations about change.

Our faculty values differences considering race, family make up, gender and economic position. Intentional literary choices impact helpful curiosity leading to thoughtful and inclusive discussions. Classroom libraries showcase titles that include families who model a variety of households as well as create a normalcy for students of color who can identify with books characters who are relatable. We truly believe in the amazing power of stories to shape and change our world in positive ways. Every child deserves to see themselves in literature and should have opportunities to identify with the characters as they read. An accurate representation of all kinds of people, abilities, and cultures in books helps the reader become more aware and accepting of others in our classrooms, on our street, in our community and in our world.

This year at SHE we were honored to write and receive a \$4,000 grant from the Maryville City Schools Foundation, enabling our library media specialist to purchase hundreds of diverse books for our library. These library and classroom titles can create a bridge to having classroom discussions between students.

Parents are hosted in reciprocal conversations regarding how to best care for their students. Sam Houston continues to value the relationship between the school and our families. This loyalty is as critical as ever as our students continue to be challenged to speak up as advocates for themselves and as allies for their classmates. Our school environment continues to grow, where parents can share struggles and perspective respecting their family's unique story and our pledge to listen and learn is upheld.

Chosen language is important in creating classroom comfortability and awareness. When giving examples, teachers often use relatable narratives to encompass varying life experiences, family make up, and perspective. Students engage when their story is recognizable in everyday classroom language.

Our school wide Story Walk featured the book “Family Is A Superpower” by Michael Dahl. Families walked a mile reading a story about different types of families and how we help each other to be strong. Our students were then encouraged to write a story about their own family’s superpowers. Our One Book Blitz selection was “Wishtree” by Katherine Applegate. This book brought our entire school together as it taught about compassion, friendship, and how to use our voice to stand up for others. This was a timely and significant message that has made a difference in the culture of our school. These books were intentionally chosen to cultivate a heightened awareness of perspective and mutual respect.

There are courageous conversations happening within our school to identify how we need to grow and change. We know we must do better and realize there is a lot of work left to do. We believe investing in the stories of our students allows us to know how we can best support them and prepare them for a lifetime of learning and responsible citizenship. This is our mission at Sam Houston.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The success of Sam Houston during the pandemic can largely be attributed to the innovative connections made by the school and district. Despite multiple challenges, we implemented creative ways to connect to our families and ultimately provide outstanding education to our students. This innovative culture wasn't developed during the pandemic, but something that has been a part of the school's DNA for many years.

One impactful and ingenious step our school took four years ago was the one-to-one device implementation. Our district worked through the inevitable challenges of a large-scale implementation and became model users of these resources. Students and teachers were fully acclimated, and this gave everyone a nimble advantage to quickly transition to digital learning. We were able to stay connected and utilize incredible resources to support learning. In fact, our school only lost two days of instruction in March of 2020 before turning to digital learning.

The creative connections continued to be exhibited in our school's commitment to safely build a family feel despite the pandemic. The partnership between our staff, students, parents, and the community has long been a secret to success at Sam Houston, and our staff were especially intentional to stay connected with our Sam Houston families this year. Two themes emerged in our creative efforts to stay connected during the pandemic: "go to them" and "take it outside." Whether it was our Popsicles With Principals event where administration went to ten different sites in the community to meet students or the Open House Lawn Visits where each teacher spent hours visiting each student's home, Sam Houston staff found a way to connect with families. In order to safely hold important celebrations and family events, we moved many of our events outside. This shift resulted in creative events that were all outside! For example, families experienced literacy through a walk on a greenway; a book was brought to life through various hands-on family outside activities; students experienced the magic of a drive-in movie theater for the first time. And, finally, the entire school had the special experience of joining together and celebrating student accomplishments through outdoor assemblies.

These are just a few examples of the creative connections ingrained in Sam Houston. Not only did these innovative adaptations allow us to safely be with our students, but it provided the foundation on which we could successfully learn and grow together.